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Bard

(continues)

He had been sleeping for six hours the lop-sided sun
bothered the dog in his head, something matters
even if it's not his house. Who is a house?
What is a tree on an island? Whose is the
crown now? Twisted circlet of Norfolk bog-iron
worn round the head of the Queen of the Aurora
in the house of the Sixth Wisdom. Measure him,
he sprawls from hour to hour like a horn.
Or a heron. Or a horse leaps a ditch a spaniel scratches
he lifts time to his teeth and gnaws, he falls
and goes nowhere. There is a settling of accounts
and then there is the quiet water of after.
When nobody is anywhere but where he is
outstretched in shady business
pavilions noisy with bright kept birds, a boy
doing something to a bench. A coathanger
wakes him. There are rooms up three flights
where after the bars close they took him
to go on drinking, sour red vino in thick coffee cups
and ugly women blaming this and that. Dawn
had nothing to do that day, the wine
was evil but it worked, it almost worked,
there still were bridges over rivers, still rivers, still
subways, the wine couldn't get rid of that,
though it made blurry ruins of what was there
it still was there. Wine ages the world
and makes men young, that is the difference.
Suppose he lived all year on the island,
suppose there were dances in the hedge,
snakeskin left on your doorsill, not war,
just one other visitor, an arrow
prodding gently from behind. The flow of time.
Gypsy gull, sodden dance in mist drench but a dance,
or all the fine high hours when the wind makes up
for the amateur musicians, flugelhorn and clarinet,
sea-bird klezmer, lunatics prancing in the surf
and you can see nothing but the wind. Behavior.
He could at any moment have just stopped and said Teach me
there is so much I don't know, explain
how it is to be me coming towards you or you

towards whom I come. Teach me what love meant
by making me. Explain the dirt of feeling
and how to wash, in what surf rinse me clean?
Or is the salt itself the fear, the long contaminant?
Explain fear. But he didn't stop and never asked.
His sleep was bluejay and a broken bottle,
his sleep was beach and stones pressed into him,
discomfort one grows used to, pain
is always new. He woke after seven hours
with the horn blowing, the one he had been bending,
forming out of sheet metal all night long,
some alloy of copper and Miriam, an Egyptian
transit, his arms wet to the elbows turned white.
He folded it and formed it and brazed the seam shut
along the ever-widening smooth trumpet bell-mouth
the slope called history. Full seven hours long it was
and his skin was white as the sound it made
when he pressed it to his lips and instead of
blowing somehow sobbed a mouth full of air in
as if we could live on colors alone. What disease
is this now, he thought in waking,
the heron had just gone and nothing is seen of its shadow
for this trumpet was only for the righteous,
like a nun facing out to sea, the wind
plastering her clothes against her inescapable form
or a log burning in the fire or a kingfisher diving,
we can't get away from it, everyone doing what they do.
Around him the theologians jabbered, small
voiced men with big bodies, godding everything
or nothing, anarchists of the ordinary, connoisseurs
of disobedience, a house they said on stilts.
That was his childhood talking. Czars and peach trees,
fishing villages, the boats moored to the pilings
underneath the pretty shacks dove-grey from weather
all opalescent was the salt wood at evening
when he'd wake from his debauch and consult the sea.

13 June 1993, Cuttyhunk

I own it in this instant seen,
this Castlehoward, this huge sea.

13 June 1993, Cuttyhunk

MAQUIS

Hold the earth up.
It supports the sky.
The president
browses among roses.

Soldiers do
what soldiers do.
We listen
with our blood.

Nothing helps.
Enter
the secret places
hot groves

baytrees
and undergrowth,
hide in noontime
inland.

The wind
will never find you.
The war
will never end.

14 June 1993
Cuttyhunk

(continues)

For seven years he had been sleeping
there are secret places in the earth
and all his science was about them
here and there a hill or vista, concrete
pillbox left from his father's war.
She showed him where they had been keeping.
Candles burned below the ground and a goat
bleated at midnight no one could find.
When you stumble onto such a place
you are at once more there
than you have ever felt and touching this
touch all such places. Geopoiesis she called it,
making earth. He witnesses. He fears
losing the hour, the *Good Hour* Duncan called it
happiness, finding yourself in time and place
and a work fit to your hands
and your hands can skill. *Bonheur*. The goat
was the wind, olive was aspen, the fallen pillars
sprawled like Susa and a rabbit sat. Nibble me
also on his mind. Provoke an ecstasy
that convulses all my botany. Use all my words
and rinse me out. He loved that word a life before
sound of water squeezing in his hands sluicing
the dishes clean. The good hour is a rinsing and a step.
At any moment fog will take the mainland
low wind on his wrist, stairs to climb,
messages from Portugal. All my life I told them
how beautiful they are now they must whisper that I am.
A stern stem. Robin transfixed with sunray,
dawns. All the journalists hid beneath the bottles
the rebel colonel snored in the cathedral, his doze
ennobled by flickering blue lights. A church
is always underground. And in mid-air at once.
Foss the cat fell down in fits. The shore of Naxos
shimmered in this nuisance of a mist.
Young mothers whimpered at their cribs. Baby sun,
baby sun, rise in haze and marry me.
The lovely is it way a jackal is concerned
with nothing but his prey. Learn singlemindedness.
And kill —is that the lesson? He thought it was *listening*

but now when the grocer was slicing the roast beef
and the joiner from the mainland lights a dry cigar?
And a grackle sails in? And the deer on the hill
look weird, like things from Australia?
Socrates was of course the end of something, not the start.
Taught in a public way, and taught the young.
Those changes entrained the curious system we still enjoy,
enduring the obvious. Should we not teach instead
those who know everything except that one small thing
we ourselves have guessed or figured out or felt?
And shouldn't we do it in the dark? Dream
is the most elite of all academies
and I have spent my science and my poetry
to make it less so, come to me hear me, Dream Work democrat.

(14 June 1993, Cuttyhunk)

N U R T U R E

Apocatastasis they named the child
from some hippie shivaree they'd seen downtown
Tasta they called her every day and taught her
morality is making people happy one by one.
If they had any sense they'd have fed her to the dog
such agony she brought with all her pleasing lies.

14 June 1993, Cuttyhunk

(continues)

He woke after eight hours eating a piece of bread, a coloring book he remembered, Broad Channel with the herons, fluting marsh grass in green evening light, a duck, isn't that enough, a knife? Some weather is coming, a night is long enough to change the world. He was shy with her, hopeless (happy) to declare his needs (not needs) a fairy godmother laid on him in the cradle such peculiar desires a great year and a day and a book a cave would never be enough to satisfy. Curse of knowing who he is by what he wants. Who wants? All the witches of Nantucket scream a gentle wind across the sound, stirs his thinking, how we get in each other's heads, I feel her thinking. Wants him to admire. Her only passion is such admiration. Chilly father I guess, internalize the enemy, betray your friends. She did, unfortunate one of the Islands, almost lost. Dreams are scattered pages of biography, nobody's life, a book on fire, house clear under water, horse hurrying in the air, a luminous translucent earth. Let stand what dream decided. The tigers of Bagdogra long since awakened to their danger and decamped. It is what they found along the way that mattered to most of them, forgetting wontedly why why were they travelling and to what unlikely goal they dawdled so beautifully by the shallow river in soft lovely faded cherry and pistachio, rainwater white. Earth watched them with her single eye. Sharing a little ocean tour he woke and woke with whaler clamoring and busy fishermen and Spain cold tips to his fingers he touched himself counted his ribs the preliminary weather of the world was adequate, save him from the adequate he woke with persian carpets speaking to him flower by flower woke with an auctioneer selling him cheap to the woman in the back row with a market basket couldn't see her face felt her fingers testing his thigh he woke with a face in his head but whose, woke with a language he didn't understand when people spoke it at normal tempo to each other,

what are they saying to him, wake with the light
confusing him with shadows, woke with seaplane landing,
woke with a red ball in his hands he had followed
woke in an island with an island in his arms.

14 June 1993, Cuttyhunk

LA CARMAGNOLE

for Charlotte

Pale bright fog and inner turbulence the difference
Tennyson asleep by the little pond dreaming *her gown*
his glaive the bishop rows silently in the leaking boat
things drown for their own sakes and dry for others.
John on Patmos dying on a long mysterious adjective
St Charles in Tamanrasset his breast bone bared
to the pagan sun. A bunch of crazy elitists
patting the People on the back. The dance. Too many
white flowers, the green bay tree, catkins of mystery.
God is their synonym for ink. "I hear the sea today,
the wind hears me." Permits the inscription
of what things mean. Turn out to mean. Mean bone.
Desert martyrdoms. Man bone. Twelve howler monkeys
at the end of Prairial. One lives for others
but most don't. Or think they don't— the world does
try, always, to be of use to us. The bishop s'amuse afloat,
reads Spenser's *Faerie Queene* vaguely troubled at his
politics, all those Irish killed, cut-rate conquistador
of one more green island. *This song is too long* he thinks.
Charles dreams, the skirt of the holy virgin fills with
can't think of the name of the flower, the fruit, fern,
faltering boughs of small trees twist in wind, fall

fills her, what would he lap be full of, he cannot think.
A word is enough to lie on, stretched into dying
like a moth out the window, like a moon paling out into dawn.
Far away he hears a telephone, and dies. The fog
is natural, robin prancing on the lawn. Trust me,
I am your hand. Voice from the cloud. And Wordsworth
heard it, far far, a tiny figure coming over Morecombe Sands,
“Robespierre is dead!” End of the terror of belonging
to anything but your own mind, that generous ocean,
that portal never closing. End of the party, sect, division,
caucus, entente, end of the cleavage into me and thee.
Something happened in these sands, this shore,
that pool. *Her gown was brittle, his sword supple,*
the apple fell, and the lake closed. Gyalings blaring
from the loud surf, wind rushing up the hill to make report,
the sea is here but you can't see me, anything
of real value goes unseen — all the rest
is fruity yummy sticky inference, the stuff
you think you feel. Eat politics for a change,
everyone the same. Equality is a precision. Bombs
fall on No Man's Land five leagues away.
Sound carries. Radio from the center of the earth,
this is Etna calling, Snaefels, Hecla, this is Radio Magma,
your ship comes in today. The earth is naked under fog.
Sun dazes through it all at once. Falters. Wait with me
the ever-deepening mystery of things. To clarify.
The life of things! Do they have their Freuds too,

humid analysts among the silences? All this somber jazz
is meant for you, my darling, crack the crust of thought
and share — what a word! a plow snouts
through what is mine and makes it yours —
the obvious simplicities inside. I thought of nothing.
They thought me. The bishop loosens his taut
white dog-collar, his plum silk rabat,
warm work paddling in summer haze, a coot
swims by with that keeping-an-eye-on-things way
waterfowl have. Do you see it with me,
the dinghy unhinged, the messy dream spilled into waking?
The wind is wet. The dance is frantic of those citizens,
is self-destructive, has something to do with swords
waved in the air and skirts kicked up and all fall down
at the end and the government takes everything away.
You have no rights except to talk about your rights.
All I know about the dance it doesn't get there.
Dance is a maybe road but not this road.
Sleepstir at herring pond — the dreamer is a modern country
somewhere in Euramerasia — the dreamer sees
a virgin built of stars — connect the flames —
approach over the broad sea and bend to whisper.
What language is she speaking now, who told me so much
when she was my father? What alphabet has so much green?
Mist sway, the drunken country listener hears or
tries to hear her, heron call, satellite pass
beacon-beaming overhead. Whence all disinformation

flows, like honeyed sunlight on your wrists
I lick to taste. Don't tickle. Je ne vais jamais plus
croire ses percluses idées, the media, the carmagnole
breaking The People into frantic joyances thereby draining
them of politics, religion and the common good. Chenier
sits alone in the center of the prison, marshaling his thought
against the Last Mistake. We don't have to do this
to ourselves. What religion teaches us to kill? Sacri-
fice or make it holy, chrism of its blood gushing,
chickenshit all over the altar, worship, worship,
the bishop remembers blessing the fleet as it sailed to Suez.
These things remember, we do not remember.
And when we lie down to do so simple
a think we think it is as sleep or pass away
language remembers for us in our heads.

15 June 1993
Cuttyhunk

THE GRIFFIN

for Charlotte

Mind fork, bend of griffin
to grab primeval egg.
Cave noise. Claw grip,
elbows like Popeye, pull up
shell bigger than he is.
Strange shimmery summery
cloud, heat-bearing, oi.
Crack egg, yellow goo
smear zenith with. Voiced
consonants of hammers.
Surf below egg white foaming,
our deed is done.

Man kind. Io. Our
dead is waking.
Every wave one human life,
aggressive breakfast.
Girl in halter boy with rag
around head national
costume of nowhere.
They are at home in the sun.
Solitaire. The griffin
goes down for another

this time blue one.
Crack a quarter on a counter,
peso. Zinc zinc. Old story
told flabbily anew,
sound of an egg.
Voiced humans hum
modernisms in heaven
halls, hmm, some no like,
what do? Break blue

egg. This time a shoe
inside it and a harp
and a Harley and an oak
the tree dropping acorns and
a pig eating them all.
All we need. Down
the griffin lances again
to get the red.
But red is slippery
as fire is, thick as fruit, falls
even and ever from
my monster claws.

Come down with me
color by color
until the dark.
See cloud horizon.
Count arrows, away
one left for
who comes now? Again
grab red egg
gets it, breaks it
full of fiery air gold
coin falling forever
into my pocket

never gets there
but on the ninth day
the ax cracks
the roof of my dacha
and I dwell.
Anxiously poetry,
a crow?

None here, a fact
or island is all wind
and a spatter of black
birds grackles gulls.
Watch endless shunt
world clutching its labels
itself together
egg by egg this

is the griffin's business,
a myth to keep
some mind at peace.

15 June 1993
Cuttyhunk

Mournful Brahmsian violin
escorting tide wrack beads or garland
of conch embryos the shells
seedcases of skates two
red flags mean hurricane

15 June 1993
Cuttyhunk

A QUESTION CAUGHT FROM DREAM

Shall I then turk it among the sleek
but lie like a dog among my own meek kind?
A marvel so, a kind of harp
that blood is playing stretched along my bones—

to sing behavior.

Be lordly.

It is the hour deer walk on the lawns.
Gulls along roof crests. Aretes. It is the soft of the day.
Deep in the groves of bay trees and old apple
airless at noonday it is still cool now
when all the rest of the island's fresh,

the rim and the center. The differences.

Be lordly,

you are the dragon of weather,
a drake penguin alone on a bitter sea,
a silly man vacationing at the shore.
We are the masters only of our definitions,
sea birds, the minor miracles of lunch.
Augustine came home with sand in his shoes.

It is the middle of the week. Cramoisy
is worn by the wives of aldermen
but not by daughters. Who wear kersey frocks
in the decade of humiliation preceding marriage.
Never mind what follows. Athane's house
can have four fires.

East me at last,

I am the warlock come back to his island.

2.

What do the words tell me when you sleep?
"to turk it among" would be to lord it
and lord it in fashion, with silks

and mulberry turbans stabbed with emeralds,
steel damascened with virtuous quotations
and "the sleek" would be the high ones of this island,
archontes, "lords of the town"
even the mayor's daughter, the alderperson's wretched son.

Whereas with meek I will submit
to live on the cropped herbage of their mild gleanings,
milk the clouds for my breakfast
seeking to be one among them?
Or seek to be no one?

A wife stands between her man and language,
she is the interpreter and the house of it,

before he knows her he moves in language
badly and barely, like a swimmer
tireder than he knows against the current.

Then she comes and guides him to the meanings.
"I am Arnaut and swim against the stream."

3.
What do the words mean
speak in me before I wake or
exactly in the moment as
their speaking is my waking?

Wake into language as a light goes out
and it is only day? Cross the white border?
The flash of light
you hear as a word?

(Three blackbirds fly by fast
the first with bread in his beak.)

4.
Six and seven of them
squabble for it,
fuss
down by that remark about the dead Indian

dug up as a monument
like a salt-lick
on a cow-free lawn.
History is only when you notice it.
Otherwise they work so hard at flying.

5.
Or only and always anything ever said.
A blue own at a county fair
the small gallery of human faces I can't forget
of people I knew not other than to see
and hence am bounded by their beauty
or their happenstance, the grin of data
laughing at them from the shelves in my head.
Nothing ever happened but this guess it did.

16 June 1993
Cuttyhunk

LEAVES FROM THE LOOSE-BARKED
PLANE TREE FALLEN

for Charlotte

It feels like morning near the British Museum
shuffling through yellow leaves in Russell Square
before all the salesmen come out and talk their way to work
under a virtuous hovering cloud
but here there's a hill and an horizon, a golden retriever,
the gifts of love are always scary,
would I get you a puppy? it would grow
like a whale like a crocodile—
the sea keeps growing, a sonata by Corelli.
Explain the differences, Mexico, Monticello.
One man has enough to find the way.
Remember the Aztec codices we saw under glass
spread out in the forgiving gloom—
perplexity of art entombed for tourists
no one to read it, no one to test
the turn of haunch into flank by
travelling fingertip. Give it to everyone
and no one will have it. Those yellow leaves
are private still because we shuffle through
without own feet, going nowhere.

16 June 1993
Cuttyhunk

THE NAMES, HE SAID

[Someone to know by name, a leper
buried on Penikese before the war:

Callinikos, pale-winged conqueror
sitting about the house complaining
like any man about his tea & coffee.]
Grain sprouts from the bottom of my well.

Arrowmaker, cutter of straw, seaman,
altarboy, leadsmith, goldbeater,
mason. Soldier. We caught our ailment
overseas — as if the rest of the planet
were just a disease.

The bad bath.

I'm glad the Germans lost
and hope they lose again.

[Where had he
come from to be buried here?
And what *beautiful victory* does his name remember,
father's deed or ancient temple
whose stones some ancestor lifted
to build a house that held his goats,
or his own triumph
over the seductions of suicide?]

Our fates also
are waiting.
Here on a mile of moraine
left moored in Buzzards Bay
I come to the end of what is named.

Rightly let them put the name on a stone
that holds tight down
the burden and the mess of being me.
I am alive again now under other auspices,

nameless, steadily forgetting.
From where you stand you see my grave
whenever you look over at America,
that endless island seven miles away.

16 June 1993
Cuttyhunk